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Book Review: Robert Courtney Smith. *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants*. The University of California Press, 2006.

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Sonia Nazario. *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother*. Random House, 2006.

Enrique's Journey disrupts typical discourses of illegal migration by considering who migrates, why migrants leave their homes and families, and how every migration is implicated in other migrations. The book relates one main story: a Honduran teenager struggles to find his mother, years after she left him behind to work in the United States. Details of Enrique's experiences propel the book, insisting that we can only understand trends in migration by attending to individual stories.

To this end, Nazario, a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*, recounts the specific ways that Enrique and children like him travel to the U.S. from Central America. They walk, run, swim, climb, ride buses, and hitchhike. Many steal rides in Mexico aboard a freight train, which has been dubbed "the train of death" for the peril that people face as they jump on and off, struggle against the gangs that claim the train as their territory, and simply try to retain a hold on the roof of the train. Often, children make successive attempts to reach the U.S., some being robbed, beaten, raped—and occasionally fed, healed, cared for—before being turned back to try the trip all over again.

These details of what children are willing to endure in order to reunite with their mothers enliven the social complexities of economically-driven chain migration. Familial ties in the country of origin both motivate and discourage migration in the first place, and once a woman has migrated, familial ties become a part of the push and pull for those she left behind. Social relations are stretched, breached, created, and displaced. Mothers who leave one family often form a new family in the States; children who attempt to ameliorate the breach with their mothers inevitably leave other family members behind. Migration begets migration.

At the same time, economic and social forces in the U.S. pull migrants here just as strongly as economic forces in their countries of origin push them to find jobs elsewhere. The children who make up the wave of migrants that Nazario studies have been left by mothers who often end up working in domestic jobs in the U.S., cleaning other people's homes and caring for other people's children. The economic pull to participate in paid domestic service in the U.S. makes women unavailable for their personal domestic roles in their country of origin. The cruel irony of this arrangement is not lost on the women Nazario interviews.

Nazario herself is forthcoming (if not reflective) about her complicity in the domestic displacement of economic immigration. Her desire to know more about the topic was piqued after the son of her Guatemalan housekeeper recounted his own experience traveling North to reunite with his mother after thirteen years of separation. This fact is jarring in light of the fact that Nazario argues that mothers would do best to stay in Central America with their families rather than travel to the U.S. to find work. Though the occasions when Nazario contributes possible solutions to the "problem" of illegal migration are few, they do distract from the strength of her description and narrative. At times the book loses sight of the main story in order to attend to less complete but equally important scenes and tales along the way. This weakness is trivial, since what is lost in narrative consistency is gained in thematic comprehensiveness.

Enrique's Journey reminds readers that any migration involves common struggles of moving through this world—the entangled feelings of love, loss, resentment, and forgiveness, along with the physical sensations of hunger, pain, heat, exposure, and exhaustion. Migration is a human experience. At the same time, migration makes some of us (especially children) more vulnerable than others. Nazario encourages readers to question the economic, social, and political relationships that reproduce this vulnerability.

---Liana Tuttle Vasseur

Robert Courtney Smith. *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants*. The University of California Press, 2006.

Mexican New York, by Robert Courtney Smith, is a highly rich and detailed ethnography on the transnational lives of Mexican migrants in New York City. Written at a time when theorizations and understandings of transnational life are still in flux, the book aims at critiquing and improving upon earlier discussions of transnational practices among contemporary migrants. The book benefits greatly from Smith's rarely-paralleled fifteen years of ethnographic research, working with Tiquanense migrants in both New York City and Tiquani, a town in the Mixteca region of southern Mexico. This extended case analysis enables Smith to examine both first- and second-generation immigrants and allows for analysis of how transnational processes evolve over the life-course of individuals. Despite the title of the book though, it does not offer an exhaustive review of

Mexican immigrant experiences in New York, but rather offers an in-depth analysis of the Tiquanense community's specific transnational practices.

Drawing from the work of sociologist Alejandro Portes and his colleagues, Smith regards transnational life as practices and experiences that link individuals, families, and social networks across national boundaries – from sending country to receiving country – and that occur in significant number and in regular fashion. However, Smith also extends the notion of transnational life as it is embodied in identities and larger social structures that dialectically interact through the lived experiences of individuals. In emphasizing transnational life at the local level, Smith avoids “invoking the invisible hand of globalization.” In addition, he stresses the importance of the dual processes of migration and assimilation in influencing transnational practices. Rather than positing transnationalization and assimilation as counter-acting processes, Smith explores how the two are often deeply intertwined and result in differing outcomes for different individuals.

Mexican New York is structured as an analysis of Tiquanense transnational life at three important sites. In the first site, Smith discusses the politics of first generation immigrants. Here he demonstrates how transnational political life intersects with local structures of power. Migrants in New York use their economic prowess to establish a significant transnational political presence in Tiquani, negotiating new power relations with the existing local political structures. At the second site, Smith analyzes gender relations among both first- and second-generation immigrants in New York, and he addresses how these relations mutate and evolve as migrants move back and forth between New York and Tiquani. Transnational life is important here because it is the site where gender roles are challenged and renegotiated, especially among adolescents and young adults. At the third site, Smith examines the varying assimilation experiences of teenage students, specifically as they relate to the students' involvement in ‘crews’ or ‘gangs,’ which Smith refers to as *pandilleros*. Smith argues that *pandilleros* fill a structural void for adolescents by offering a sense of belonging and increased social status within peer groups. Transnational practices are significant in that they allow for the recruitment of adolescents in Tiquani, where local social structures have been weakened by frequent out-migrations.

Smith recognizes that there are a number of positive outcomes from engaging in transnational life. It enables immigrants to retain some social status and political power in Mexico while living abroad. It enables parents to pass on cultural practices and institute cultural identities among their

American born children (e.g., every year many migrants in New York return to Tiquani for the annual Feast of Padre Jesus). Through such practices, transnational life offers an arena in which second generation Mexican Americans seek to authenticate or legitimize their identity and “Mexican-ness”. Smith also acknowledges that transnational life can have darker and less often recognized outcomes as well. Harsh assimilation experiences, especially among adolescents, can lead to considerable confusion and antagonism. Transnational gang activity is both a symptom and result of such hardships, and Smith predicts that such activities will continue to proliferate across national borders.

This book contributes significantly to the study of migrations and transnational life. It documents the significance of Tiquanense transnational activities in both the sending and receiving countries. Contrary to what some might expect, transnational life continues for many beyond the first-generation and into the second-generation of Mexican Americans and beyond. Smith demonstrates the importance of transnational life for Mexican American adolescents growing up in New York. Transnational life offers the potential to help shape cultural identities and enables youths to negotiate the pressures of assimilation. In this way, transnational life is best understood in relation to the other factors that largely affect it, including political structures, changes in the life course, adolescence, gender relations, etc. *Mexican New York* succeeds in extending transnationalization studies beyond the economic and political spheres, and it opens the door for scholars to engage with the cultural and social components of transnational life as well. Such an embedded analysis acknowledges the important role of larger structures and processes, yet it also stresses the agency of individual migrants and their children in constituting transnational practices.

--- Benjamin L. Blandford

Tabish Khair, Martin Leer, Justin Edwards and Hanna Ziadeh. *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing*. Indiana University Press, 2005.

The ever intriguing dynamics of postcolonial writing in the tradition of “writing back” assumes yet another dimension with the publication of *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing*. The anthology with multiple co-editorship by Tabish Khair, Martin Leer,